

## Assessing library online patrons use of resources to improve outreach and marketing

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Harlow, S., and Hill, K. (2020). Assessing library online patrons use of resources to improve outreach and marketing. *The Serials Librarian*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0361526X.2019.1703873>

**This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis *The Serials Librarian* on 04 March 2020, available online:**

**<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/0361526X.2019.1703873>.**

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### **Abstract:**

Online learning and distance programs are a growing trend in higher education, and equitable access to library services and resources is vital for online students. While advertising to all patrons is important, marketing and outreach about electronic resources is crucial for online users, who often cannot physically come to the library for materials and rely on electronic collections for research and assignments. In Fall 2017, two academic librarians from public and technical services departments developed a marketing plan to promote electronic resources and online services for research by designing and distributing two virtual surveys to students taking courses online and instructors teaching online. The analysis of these surveys directly informed library promotion of electronic resources via the development of a marketing plan, as well as a more in-depth library integration in the university learning management system (LMS), with these strategies leading to an increase in e-resource usage.

**Keywords:** Online learning | distance education | e-resources | marketing | outreach | surveys

### **Article:**

#### **Introduction**

Online programs are rapidly increasing in higher education. As of Fall 2015, the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics found that 30 percent of higher education students are in "any distance education course".<sup>1</sup> According to the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Standards for Distance Learning Library Services, university and college libraries have an obligation to provide equal services and resources to all students, including distance students and students taking online courses.<sup>2</sup> At the University of North Carolina Greensboro (UNCG) as of 2017, 20% of credit hours are offered online and 50% percent of students take a class online each semester.<sup>3</sup> Often online students are working adults, returning to school, and they can feel isolated from the rest of campus.<sup>4</sup>

Some efforts have been made to address this growing trend in online learning at UNCG University Libraries (UNCG Libraries), such as the addition of an Online Learning Librarian position; but little has been done to assess how librarians can better inform patrons about online resources. While advertising to all patrons is important, marketing and outreach about electronic resources is vital for online users, who often cannot physically come to the library for materials and rely on electronic collections for research and assignments. Because online users often feel disconnected from campus, it is important for libraries to investigate ways to improve marketing campaigns to distance students and instructors. In Fall 2017, UNCG Libraries E-Resource and Online Learning Librarian's decided to develop a marketing plan to promote electronic resources and online services by designing and distributing two virtual surveys to UNCG students taking courses online and UNCG instructors teaching online. The analysis of these surveys directly informed library promotion of electronic resources via the development of a marketing plan, as well as a more in-depth library integration in the UNCG learning management system (LMS), with these strategies leading to an increase in e-resource usage.

This study addresses the following research questions: Does conducting and then implementing marketing research correlate with higher usage of electronic resources? What trends exist in how distance education students and faculty prefer to learn about new resources? How can libraries analyze market research surveys to get the best understanding possible of outreach and marketing opportunities?

## **Literature review**

There is much literature on librarians sending surveys to assess their resources and services to distance students and instructors, with many finding a lack of awareness from these populations. Alewine distributed an online survey of five questions at UNC Pembroke on the satisfaction of distance education students with library resources and services.<sup>5</sup> Hensley and Miller conducted a survey to online graduate students, which shed light on student communication preferences and research needs.<sup>6</sup> Skarl and Del Bosque distributed a survey to face-to-face and online graduate students, aligning the results to the ACRL Standards for Distance Learning Library Services; these authors found that many graduate students were not aware of library resources.<sup>7</sup> Surveys have also been sent out to distance faculty. These surveys typically ask about library services, as well as information retrieval. Instructors teaching online and at a distance also perceive a barrier to library use, usually through a lack of awareness of services.<sup>8</sup> Coding textual data is also an important assessment strategy, particularly concerning in depth analysis of survey comments. Various librarian administrators have used the methodology of coding LibQUAL+ survey comments.<sup>9</sup>

Numerous articles have laid out marketing guides for libraries.<sup>10</sup> Market research in libraries is usually the development of surveys and focus groups that seek to answer how a specific segment of one's user population seeks out services or resources in their daily life. A big difference between this type of investigation and other types of library research is that assessment questions center around the user instead of the library.<sup>11</sup> Some studies suggest conducting marketing research and developing a plan for outreach, such as considering who will be responsible for creation of materials, who is the primary audience of the marketing and outreach, what are the initial goals of the marketing, and how will one assess the meeting of these goals.<sup>12</sup> These case

studies and articles show that marketing research is vital because it helps the library create a more user-centered physical and online space.

As a subset of marketing guides and plans, librarians have implemented various outreach strategies for distance students. Dermody reviews the importance of knowing the demographics and needs of online students, working with faculty teaching online, and collaborating across campus in order to create effective marketing campaigns.<sup>13</sup> At Texas A&M University Libraries, a group of librarians implemented a plan to promote virtual reference services to distance education students through their instructors and an email campaign.<sup>14</sup> And Girton demonstrates the unique needs of advertising to distance students through using empathetic marketing, focusing “on the core emotional needs of students” and demonstrating “how the library’s staff and services can help meet those needs”.<sup>15</sup> Librarians also have experience working with departments outside of the library in order to create promotional materials for distance students, such as working with education program administrators, instructional technology departments, and other local or national libraries outside of the university.<sup>16</sup> However, these articles do not address conducting marketing research, but instead focus on library services.

While there is literature on distance education students and marketing services, there is a gap when it comes to conducting market research concerning online patrons and their electronic resource usage. Based on Kennedy’s literature review on e-resource marketing and libraries, assessment was typically the weakest part of marketing plans.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Vasileiou and Rowley conducted a survey to librarians about eBook marketing, and they found that no participating institution had performed market research before conducting outreach efforts.<sup>18</sup> There have been some studies that have used surveys and other user studies to inform electronic resource promotion. Leong distributed a survey to distance education students, which resulted in the creation of direct emails to faculty and a redesign of the website for discoverability, but no marketing plan was implemented.<sup>19</sup> Ireland and Woods described an advertising objective that included electronic resources and assessment based on increased usage of eBooks and databases.<sup>20</sup> More recently, Rodger and Nielsen implemented a campaign for e-resources that included assessment alongside a marketing strategy, which featured blogs and specific website resources.<sup>21</sup> Though Woods and Ireland and Rodger and Nielson do use marketing proposals and assessment, neither article features market research as a foundation of outreach plan creation.

## **Methodology**

The UNCG Libraries E-Resources Librarian and Online Learning Librarian created two surveys for online students and instructors teaching online. These surveys were created based on a market research inspired methodology. The main difference between more traditional library surveys like LibQual and market research assessments are the focus of the questions. According to Frey, “market research can be defined as a set of activities and approaches aimed at gathering information about companies as well as current and potential customers and their needs, possibilities, and expectations”.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, these surveys were designed to gather patron responses to help librarians understand where distance students and instructors go to find and use scholarly information. For example, instead of asking how users would like to find out about library resources, they were asked “How often do you use the following methods to find out about new information for school/research/instruction?” Using market research methodology to

create a survey helps eliminate some user bias and allows librarians to see how services and resources work within distance patron's current research and information finding behavior.

These surveys attempted to discover what library resources these populations used to find out new information. The student survey asked about online resources used for school, whereas the faculty survey aimed to analyze what online resources were used for virtual instruction and research. Responses about methods used to find new information and what needs drove the respondents to search for information also varied, as can be seen in the different questions posed in the two surveys (Appendix A and B). While some responses overlap, the student survey mentions relying on faculty and friends for information, while the instructor survey cites fellow researchers and recent literature. And lastly, only instructors were asked to list resources they would recommend to students to complete various academic tasks.

The surveys were designed to track a small amount of demographic information, such as major or department, with anonymous responses. Both surveys consisted of a combination of Likert scale, multiple choice, and short answer. The surveys did collect some information about how users view the library and its resources through questions like "In terms of virtual UNCG University Libraries services and resources, how frequently have you ..." and "How important are the following UNCG University Libraries virtual services and resources to your teaching and research". Questions like this helped give the author's context and understand where various aspects of the library fit into the user's life.

**Table 1.** Code groups and codes for Fall 2017 UNCG Libraries surveys to instructors and students for open ended comments inputted into Atlas TI.

Code Group for Open-Ended Comments:	Codes within Group:
Barriers to Access	Access to materials, budget, lack of knowledge, off campus students, technical issues, time issues and business
Feelings Emotions	Lack of knowledge, negative, none/not applicable (NA), positive, technical issues, time issues and business
Finding Information	Canvas, Google, Google Scholar, orientation, programming, specific department
Library Resources	Course guides, databases, ebooks, films and videos, journals, resources for department, textbooks, tutorials, videos
Library Services	Apps and mobile technology, book pick up and delivery, chat, citations, consultations with librarians, data services and management, Digital Media Commons (DMC), graduate students, instruction from librarian, interlibrary loan (ILL), library liaison, literature review, orientation, printing, research assistance, technology lending, webinars, and workshops
Marketing, Promotion, Outreach	Direct contact request, email marketing, orientation, programming, specific departments
Student Population	Graduate students, off campus students, undergraduate students, and students
Usability	Access to materials, apps and mobile technology, technical issues, and website usability

The surveys were sent out through batch email to any UNCG student taking an online class (both face-to-face and distance) and any UNCG instructor teaching an online class (including tenure track faculty, lecturers, and adjuncts). These surveys were sent to a total of 8,387 students and 334 instructors. Both groups had one month to respond to the survey, and reminder emails were

sent one week before the deadline. To improve survey response rates, the incentive of a 25-dollar gift card to Barnes & Noble was offered, through a random drawing of participants unlinked from survey data to protect anonymity. Qualtrics was used to examine closed questions (Likert scale and multiple choice). A gap analysis was performed to determine how satisfaction with library services and importance of library services match for both populations. A coding system was used within the qualitative data system Atlas TI for short answer questions (Table 1).

For the question “what resources would you recommend to students if they want to ...”, instructors inputted resources used for a variety of tasks, such as developing a topic for a research assignment, writing a literature review, locating citation information, and finding multimedia for courses. The responses were coded differently so that broad types of resources could be grouped (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Codes used for the open question in the UNCG Libraries survey to instructors for “what resources would you recommend to students if they want to ...” inputted into Atlas TI.

Code Group:	Codes within Group:
Question: “What resources would you recommend to students if they want to ...”	Databases, Google, class readings, professor created materials, specific resource, catalog, course guides, journals, Google Scholar, librarians, UNCG Writing Center, and specific library department.

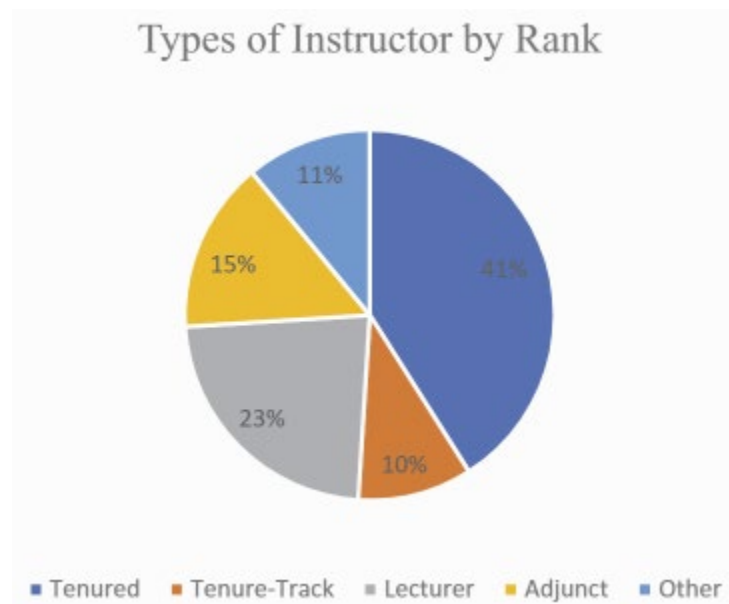
This survey methodology has limitations. While general trends can be seen within responses, no attempt was made to find additional data that might triangulate these results to demonstrate a stronger correlation. Results also relied on self-reported behavior from students and faculty, which can be inaccurate or idealized versions of research and searching trends. This survey was sent to face-to-face students taking online classes, which limited the ability to differentiate between fully online, majority online, and in-person students; therefore, this survey is not a fully accurate representation of UNCG’s distance population. Finally, when the survey asked about “library resource use” there were separate categories for eBooks and streaming media; all others electronic resources were grouped under “used UNCG Libraries website or catalog to search for materials”. This generic category makes it challenging to understand the usage of specific electronic resources.

## Demographics: Instructors and students

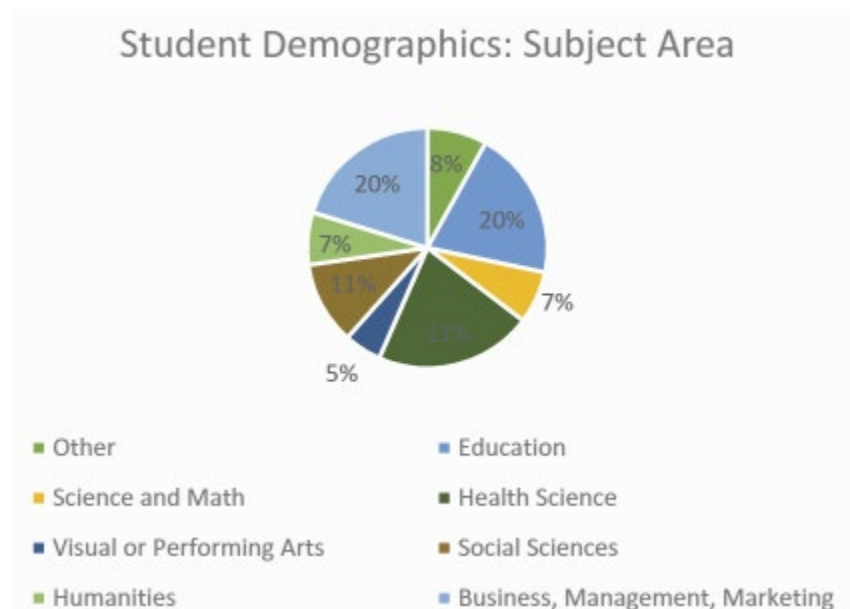
A total of 74 UNCG instructors who teach online responded to the survey, creating a 22% response rate. Most of the instructors taught in Health Sciences, followed by the School of Education. This demographic information lines up with the largest online programs offered at UNCG and indicates that the sample mirrors the online instructor population. The percentage of tenured versus non-tenured professors also tracks with known demographics, as 51% of UNCG instructors are tenured, compared to the 41% percent of tenured professors who responded (see Figure 1).<sup>23</sup>

A total of 708 students taking online courses took this survey, creating a response rate of 8.4% response rate. Though this is a low response rate, it’s a representative of around 24% of the fully online student population at UNCG. The top three majors or subjects for students were evenly split between Education, Health Sciences, and Business, Marketing, Management, which are the UNCG schools with the most online courses (see Figure 2). The participant’s course format was

evenly split between their programs being online, face-to-face, and both online and face-to-face (hybrid). In terms of status, most of the participants were undergraduates, and 22% were graduate students, including PhD students.



**Figure 1.** Chart of “Type of Instructor: Tenure track status was the majority” from the instructor type question asked in the UNCG Fall 2017 virtual survey to UNCG instructors. Tenure track professors were 41% of respondents.

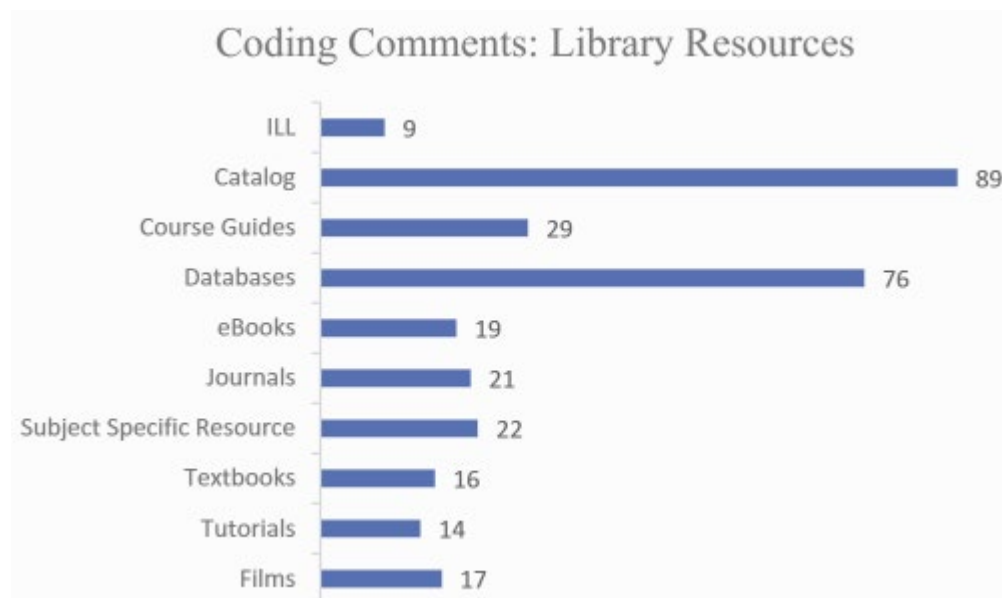


**Figure 2.** Chart of UNCG student subject areas from Fall 2017 survey. The majority was split between health sciences, education, and business students.

### Survey findings, instructors

In the instructor survey, participants mainly find resources for their classes and research through UNCG Libraries (78%), fellow researchers (59%), and other campus resources including the University Teaching and Learning Commons (UTLC), instructional technology consultants (ITCs), and UNCG Online (55%) on a monthly basis. Most instructors went to UNCG Libraries (59%) for new information weekly. In terms of methods of receiving communication and finding information, instructors check the library website and their email at least monthly. Around 46% of instructors employ web browsing (such as Google) to find content for courses, making it the most used daily source. Over 50% of instructors reported that they had not heard of or never use social media, flyers and posters, and RSS feeds/Browzine/listservs to find information.

Faculty were also asked what types of resources they recommend to their students for assignments, from beginning a research paper to learning how to cite. While responses varied by topic, the most popular answers were Google, Google Scholar, and general library search (referred to often as “the Catalog”, “the Library”, or “Databases”). When faculty responded to the question “What resources would you recommend to your students if they want to ... ” the second most common library resource mentioned was “Databases.” In terms of citation assistance, 75% of these respondents noted online resources such as the citation style website or Purdue OWL. While instructors recognized the importance of library resources, it was rare for them to mention specific databases, library course guides, or a librarian when recommending resources to students (see Figure 3).

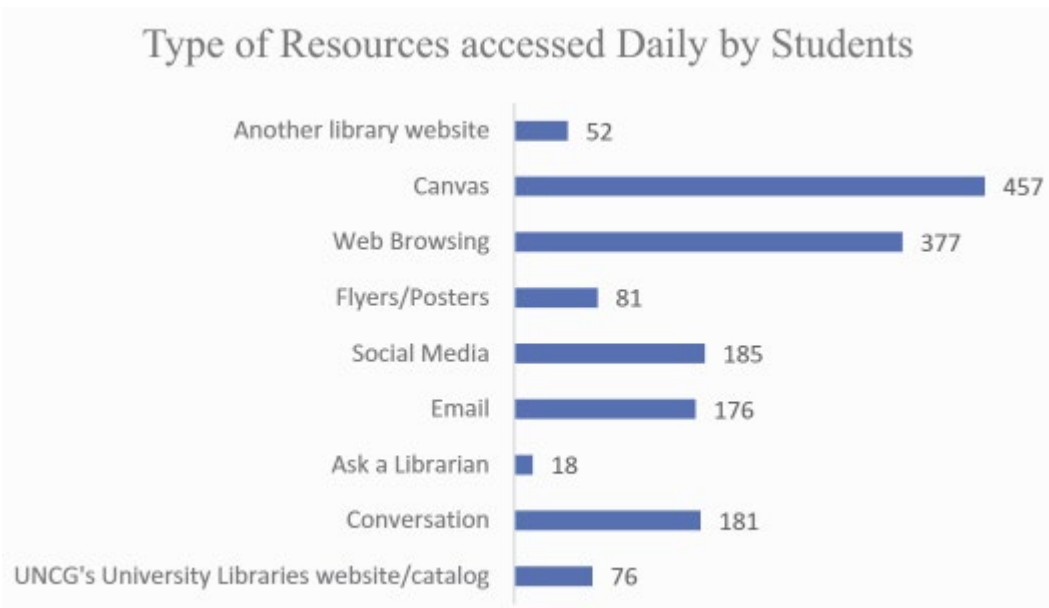


**Figure 3.** Chart from the Fall 2017 UNCG survey sent to instructors depicting the coding of comments from instructors about library resources, including videos, tutorials, textbooks, resources for department or subject, journals, films and videos, eBooks, databases, course guides, catalog, book pickup and delivery, and apps and mobile technology. The catalog and databases were mentioned the most frequently.

Looking at the survey responses about library resource use, instructors most frequently turned to the library catalog, with over 58% of respondents stating they used it on a weekly or daily basis. Also used monthly are eBooks (44%), streaming media (25%), and Interlibrary Loan (ILL)

(31%). Many instructors never chat in through the library website (52%), ask a librarian to create a course guide (55%), or have a librarian embed in their online courses (52%). Instructors main reasons for not using library resources are that they get the information they need from the internet (17%), their classes and research do not require the use of library materials (13%), and the library's website is too difficult to use (10%).

A comparison analysis was performed in order to understand what the respondent instructors considered important versus their usage behavior. In terms of importance and satisfaction with library resources, the instructors listed online resources and ILL as the most important functions of UNCG Libraries. For general electronic resources, the percentage which consider them important or very important (96%) compared favorably to the percentage of instructors who use the library catalog at least once a year (92%). However, there is a gap between the importance of overall library electronic resources and the use of streaming media, with 40% of professors never using streaming media. These results show that faculty consider library electronic resources vital, but do not usually use or know about streaming services, a hole in knowledge that the library has the opportunity to fill..



**Figure 4.** Chart from Fall 2017 survey to students created within Qualtrics from the question “How often do you use the following methods to learn about new information for school?” The “Daily” response shown here depicts Canvas and web browsing (Google, Bing) as the most used. The categories listed are UNCG’s University Libraries website/catalog, conversations (face-to-face, text, or chat based), ask a librarian, email, social media, flyers/posters, web browsing (Google, Bing), Canvas, another library website/catalog, and other.

### Survey findings, students

When asked how frequently they search for new information to fulfill needs, students are more likely to search the internet to consume information for fun than for research, but almost 50% of students listed that they search online weekly to “understand topics covered in class” and “start researching an assigned project.” In order to understand class topics and perform research, most



students report that they turn to their teachers and friends on at least a weekly basis (56% and 64% respectively) to get information for school. Students did report using UNCG Libraries resources, with around 50% of students used virtual library resources on a weekly basis. The survey also asked students about their information retrieval methods for classwork, and students daily rely on web browsing such as Google (63%) and the UNCG learning management system (LMS) Canvas (76%) (see Figure 4).

When students were asked about their use of library resources, students reported a familiarity with the catalog (73% using it monthly) and eBooks, with 59% using them at least monthly. Students were not very familiar with streaming resources, with 47% never having used streaming media from the library. Many students who responded to the survey had never used UNCG Libraries virtual chat, ILL, or consulted with a librarian. In terms of importance, most students found that online resources (articles, eBooks, databases, and streaming film) were very important (60.52%) and around 51% of students were very satisfied with online resources. Around 28% of students listed that their coursework does not require the use of library materials and that they get all the information they need from the internet; this does not match with instructor survey results, where only 13% of faculty responded that their courses do not require the library.

### **Discussion of marketing results**

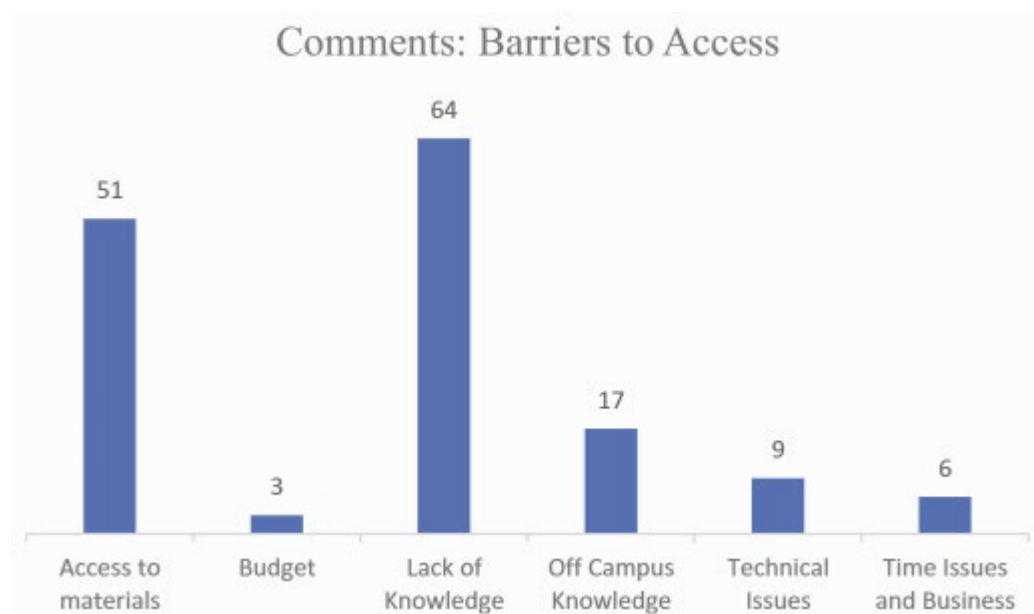
By combining the quantitative analysis above with the coding of the open ended responses for the survey questions “What additional resources and services do you wish UNCG University Libraries would offer?” and “Do you have any other comments or concerns about the library and online learning/distance education?” an examination was performed to better market library e-resources and online services to all library patrons. The survey asked about library resources and services that UNCG Libraries does not currently offer to help staff develop new programs or purchase new materials that would improve outreach to distance populations.

Specific resources were mentioned in both survey comments. Resources and services that students want included online textbook lending (7 mentions), more group study space (8 mentions), increased technology lending and availability (5 mentions), and the ability to hold books for students or send books to local libraries for pick up (4 mentions). Besides asking for timelier ILL book delivery, faculty did not mention wanting any new or improved services. Instructors did comment on library resources, such as 7 out of the 15 wanting more research materials. One instructor mentioned “we do the best with what we have. I want budget cuts restored. I miss some of the databases we have lost”. In order to examine barriers to access for UNCG online students and instructors, negative comment trends were analyzed. For both surveys, 26 of the 37 responses that were coded as negative comments noted usability issues. These respondents found some items challenging to locate and indicated that certain library search interfaces, such as the overall database interface and the catalog, were difficult to use.

While many of these concerns could apply to on and off-campus students, online students drew attention to areas in which they felt isolated. Some comments were directed at specific non-traditional student populations, such as “it’s hard to find the info I need. Maybe freshmen are shown how to navigate, but as a transfer I was not given many resources”. Another online student wanted “to attend my online night classes” in the library, whereas another was frustrated

at being “2 hours away from the school”. Some online students wanted tutorials and training geared towards distance students about accessing materials online, such as “more instructions on how to utilize resources when off campus”. Online graduate students asked for more personal contact with liaison librarians earlier in their program in order to stay on track for their dissertation or thesis, as well as digital methodology services and instruction. The Online Learning Librarian and research librarians provide a variety of online tutorials and learning objects, including a Distance Education website, as well as research guides for every subject at UNCG; these comments demonstrate a gap between what the library offers and promotion of these resources.

There was a consistent trend in the survey comments about a “lack of awareness” concerning library resources and services (see Figure 5). The code with the second highest number of comments in the surveys was “lack of knowledge”. Faculty were more likely to blame themselves, such as “you offer plenty, I just need to make time to learn more about what you offer and how to use it in my courses”. Out of the 38 comments coded “lack of knowledge” from students, 16 comments mentioned that the library should perform better marketing. In terms of the types of resources where faculty and students had a lack of knowledge, streaming media was mentioned often, and all respondents provided suggestions about library outreach (see Figure 6). The common suggestions were email advertisements, orientations, online tutorials, library workshops, and more integration into the UNCG LMS Canvas. One instructor recommended a one-credit online course for incoming online students.



**Figure 5.** Chart from coding comments in UNCG Fall 2017 survey to online students and students taking online courses. This chart depicts student comments about “barriers to access” with “lack of knowledge” being coded as the largest barrier to access to online library resources and services. Other barriers to access listed on the chart include access to materials, budget, off-campus students, technical issues, and time issues or business.



**Figure 6.** Chart from two surveys sent Fall 2017 to instructors teaching online and students taking online courses, showing a breakdown of marketing suggestions made within the open-ended comments. This chart depicts the marketing suggestions of email, inclusion in orientations, online tutorials, and library workshops.

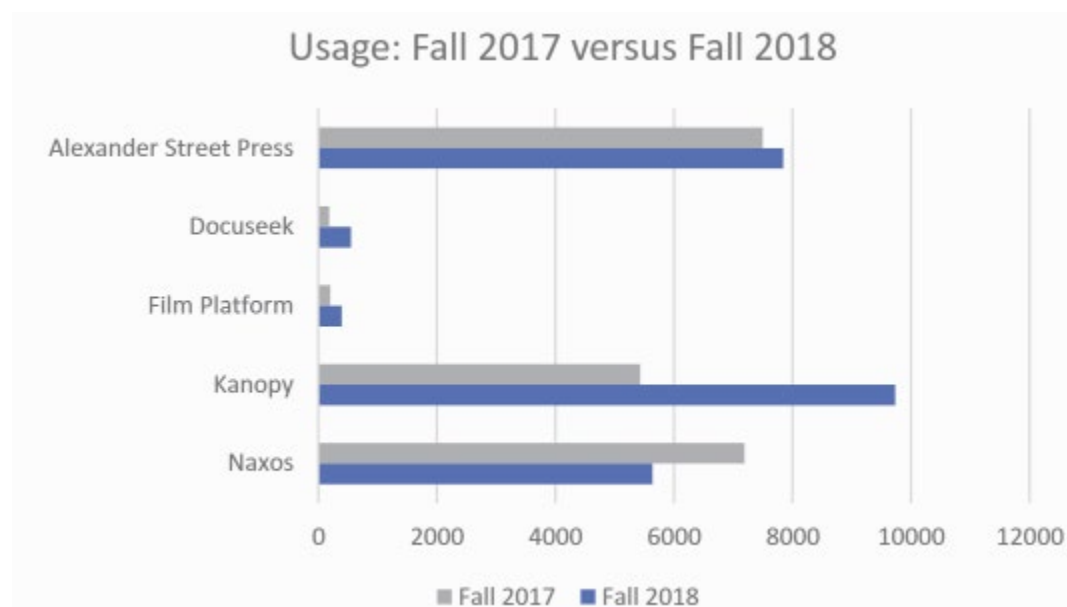
### **Implementing marketing and outreach changes at UNCG libraries based on assessment**

Many librarians think outreach and marketing is important and are aware of the “lack of knowledge” challenges of e-resources with distance instructors and students. This study shows that surveys can provide a map for librarians to use assessment data to better promote library e-resources to online students and instructors. Often the resources requested and suggested within the survey by students and instructors were materials or services that UNCG Libraries already has or owns, so the question becomes how can librarians’ better market and promote these online services and resources? UNCG Libraries used survey analysis to change and implement new marketing and outreach strategies to students and instructors. The librarians who created and distributed this survey met with librarians in charge of assessment, liaisons, and the UNCG Libraries Director of Communication and Marketing and formed a new team of librarians to discuss marketing strategies. Within this new library marketing team, results of this survey were shared, and the team decided to focus outreach efforts to faculty by promoting streaming media. Considering the instructor survey comparison analysis, the largest disparities were between the use of and the importance of e-resources, and the only type of resources faculty specifically mentioned concerning “lack of knowledge” was streaming media. Lastly, for distance academic populations to incorporate multimodal materials into the classroom, streaming media becomes the only option.

The UNCG marketing team looked at which streaming media resources had low usage statistics, as well as a variety of subjects represented. This team decided to create a blog “Librarian Recommended: Electronic Resources at UNCG”.<sup>24</sup> The E-Resources Librarian and a UNCG Serials Acquisitions Specialist developed posts on how different library e-resources could be used in teaching and learning, as well as research. UNCG liaison librarians were contacted each

time a new post was created, and UNCG faculty had the ability to be alerted about new posts. In collaboration with UNCG Libraries' main marketing team, social media posts to highlight the blog were performed on Twitter and Facebook. The blog was published and promoted in Spring 2018, with 6 posts written and disseminated throughout the semester. At the end of the semester, metrics were analyzed to determine if the blog marketing plan worked.

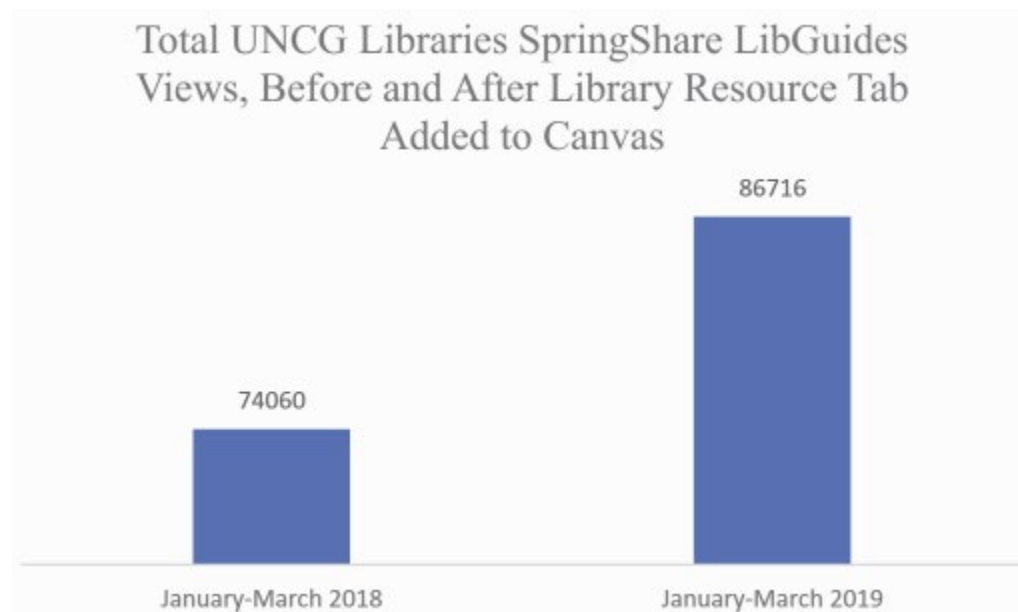
By September 2018, the blog was visited over 1,000 times, with 73% of hits or views coming from UNCG Libraries website, with no hits coming from a direct click on the blog's URL; therefore, email marketing via library liaisons did not lead to blog traffic, but the UNCG Libraries website spotlight had an impact. The marketing team also compared usage for the six blog posts of electronic resources, using COUNTER reports when available. When COUNTER was not available, video or track plays were implemented as the main usage metric. Library streaming play was compared from Fall 2017 to Fall 2018 and usage went up. The blog also featured Naxos, a streaming music service; its usage went down and the reasons for this are unclear (see Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Chart comparing e-resources featured on “Librarian Recommended: Electronic Resources at UNCG” blog from before they were featured versus after they were featured in Fall 2017 versus Fall 2018. This chart shows that the e-resources usage went up after being featured on the blog. The e-resources listed on this chart include Naxos, Kanopy, Film Platform, Docuseek, and Alexander Street Press.

The UNCG Libraries marketing team will continue to update the blog based on low usage of certain library resources. The E-Resources Librarian will review procedures for emailing liaisons when new blog posts are out to see if there is a better method of sharing content via email with faculty. In order to track online course streaming media usage, a future survey about streaming could be sent to instructors teaching online, as well performing interviews with online instructors about course materials. The E-Resources Librarian, with colleagues in UNCG Libraries Technical Services department, are in the process of conducting faculty focus groups on utilization of streaming media.

Based on the survey data about online patrons believing that they do not need library resources and services for course work, as well as the claim that students rely heavily on the LMS and instructors for information retrieval, UNCG Libraries decided to integrate better within the UNCG LMS Canvas. This was achieved through creating a Canvas integration with Springshare LibGuides. Starting in January 2019, every academic course at UNCG that has a Canvas shell also has a Library Resources tab, connecting to an online library course or subject research guide. These research guides show up on the Canvas course navigation menu and are based on metadata determined by the library liaison within LibGuides. UNCG library liaisons were trained by the Online Learning Librarian on setting up metadata for the LibGuides. With this new integration, UNCG LibGuides views were up by over 10,000 views from the same time frame in 2018 and 2019 (see Figure 8). The Library Resources Canvas guide that was designed as a “fail safe” to appear in Canvas was the most viewed UNCG LibGuide as of March 2019.



**Figure 8.** Chart showing the increase in UNCG Libraries overall SpringShare LibGuides views from early Spring 2018 versus Spring 2019, after the addition of the integration of an LTI in Canvas.

Though UNCG has many physical orientations and tours of the libraries, these surveys motivated the UNCG Online Learning Librarian to create online orientations through UNCG’s synchronous learning management system or virtual meeting tool Webex. Three orientation series of 30-minute webcasts were created for instructors, graduate students, and undergraduates and they were offered in August 2018. These orientations were hosted and recorded in Webex and covered online services for instructors and students at UNCG. Gift card incentives were offered through a drawing of registered attendees who showed up for the online orientations and filled out an evaluation. Over 50 instructors registered for these online orientations, with around 30 attending. Around 10 graduate students signed up, with around 5 attending, and no undergraduate students signed up.

In the future, UNCG Libraries will shift these orientations for undergraduates to a later time of year and continue to focus and provide incentives for instructors to attend these orientations. An evaluation survey was sent out to all the virtual orientation attendees, asking about satisfaction ranking, something they learned, something they wished was covered, and future suggestions. Of the attendees who took this evaluation, most instructors and graduate students were extremely satisfied (33 out of 43 respondents) and no one listed dissatisfaction. When asked about “what is something you learned from the UNCG Libraries Orientation?” respondents mentioned increased knowledge of online research guides, liaison librarians, and a variety of discovery tools. Some suggestions for future orientations included longer orientations (45 minutes instead of 30 minutes), covering educational technology available in the library, more about physical space, archival resources, and more about library instruction. Future orientations could also include an immediate follow up study of e-resource usage to better connect to the usefulness of these orientations.

### **Future directions**

UNCG Libraries would like to continue to create and analyze assessments about library online resources and services in order to improve marketing and outreach. This survey was useful to UNCG librarians in a variety of ways; the E-Resources Librarian and Online Learning Librarian continue to use the data from this survey to advocate for e-resources, virtual services, and more programming within the LMS. Therefore, UNCG Libraries will continue to send surveys targeted at online students and instructors in the future, ideally every five years. Some changes could improve the usefulness of the survey, such as more questions about overall discovery habits and usability trends of users regarding their research. In addition, attempting to focus questions so that information concerning physical space was not included would also be a good adjustment for future surveys. Other librarians can use this survey as a guide to create assessment for specific populations based on their distinct needs at a variety of institutions.

The survey data showed negative comments about usability, particularly the catalog and the website, showing that properly accessing library databases are vital for discovery; therefore, there are future opportunities for studies to focus on assessment and discovery. Discovery, defined as the interfaces and metadata that surround resources so that they can be found by users, plays a major role for academic distance populations when it comes to barriers to library use. Discovery and usability are essential to marketing and outreach; if a user cannot find something, they will not use it despite how the library markets that resource. Issues with discovery found in this survey led to UNCG librarians conducting pop-up usability tests where students were given tasks on the home webpage, database interface, and course LibGuides. These tests were recorded on a laptop, in the lobby of UNCG Jackson Library. After an analysis of these usability tests alongside this surveys data, UNCG Libraries chose a new subject-based database interface from SpringShare to replace the prior interface. While these changes may address some of the issues raised in the survey, researchers could engage in other strategies to improve discoverability in the future; this includes administering more user surveys to examine current pathways to library resources from the website homepage, as well as conducting a deeper analysis of these usability studies and the resulting changes.

Beyond surveys, there are a variety of assessment and outreach opportunities to improve e-resource knowledge and access for online and distance patrons. UNCG Libraries is working with the libraries' Director of Marketing and Communications to integrate with campus newsletters about research, teaching and learning, and instructional technology. The UNCG Online Learning Librarian is continuing to add to and incorporate library liaison's online learning objects about virtual library services within guides and the library website; future assessments and usability studies on these learning objects could be useful. This librarian is also running virtual focus groups and interviews with distance students, as well as performing an in-depth analysis of library virtual chat transcripts by looking at UNCG Nursing chats (which has a large online and distance student population).

## **Conclusion**

As online populations continue to grow in higher education, a larger percentage of library collections exist electronically. It is vital for librarians to connect academic users to online research services and resources that lead to successful academic careers. Implementing surveys to UNCG virtual students and instructors allowed the UNCG E-Resources and Online Learning Librarian's to assess distance education user's marketing and outreach preferences. Reporting out the survey results to UNCG Libraries led to new marketing campaigns, an analysis of an electronic resources blog, orientations, and a Canvas integration; all these initiatives led to an increase in usage of library resources and services. This paper's findings show that purposefully designed market research assessments can lead to the development outreach plans to increase usage of library resources and services. When considering if one should perform market research at a library, even a short survey to users is a worthwhile investment to increase the use of electronic resources, online research guides, and overall collections. UNCG librarians plan on building on this work through additional investigations into user behavior and how patrons consume information. By building on this work through additional market research techniques, UNCG Libraries hopes to develop a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the needs and wants of patrons. Because there has been little work on examining outreach and marketing strategies for electronic resources, more studies of this nature would help build a corpus of best practices for advertising electronic resources. So often libraries purchase expensive online materials and collections but struggle to bring the resource into the hands of users. It is time for collections and electronic resource librarians to look beyond usage statistics, but instead listen to the needs of users in order to purchase and maintain impactful library resources.

## **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## **Notes**

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## Appendix A



THE UNIVERSITY *of* NORTH CAROLINA  
**GREENSBORO**  
University Libraries

All responses are confidential. However, absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing. You may choose not to answer any question which makes you feel uncomfortable or you may stop at any time. There are no risks or benefits for participants. You may print or email this letter for your records. Completing this survey indicates consent to participate in this research study.

Thank-you so much for your time! If you have any concerns about your rights or how you are being treated you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG at 336-256-1482. Questions about this survey or your benefits or risks may be answered by Kate Hill (kmhill6@uncg.edu) and Samantha Harlow (slharlow@uncg.edu)

Please tell us about yourself:

- ☐ Tenured Professor
- ☐ Tenure-Track Professor
- ☐ Lecturer
- ☐ Adjunct
- ☐  Other

During the past two academic years, on average, how many of your courses did you teach online each semester?

What is your subject area?

- ☐ Business, Management, Marketing (for example, Economics, Finance, Accounting)
- ☐ Humanities (for example, English, History, Languages, Religious Studies)
- ☐ Social Sciences (for example, Political Science, Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology)
- ☐ Visual or Performing Arts (for example, Art, Music, Drama, Dance)
- ☐ Health Sciences (for example, Nursing, Nutrition, Public Health, Kinesiology)
- ☐ Science and Math (for example, Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Computer Science)
- ☐ Education (for example, Library Science, Teacher Education, Special Education, Counseling)
- ☐  Other

Have you ever used the UNCG University Libraries *virtual* services of:

	Yes	No
Jackson Library	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Digital Media Commons (DMC)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Harold Shiffman Music Library	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Special Collections or University Archives (SCUA)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching Resource Center (TRC)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often do you use these resources to *find new information* for your classes and research:

	Never	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly
Fellow researchers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
UNCG University Libraries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional organizations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recent literature in your field	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other campus resources (UTLC, ITCs, UNCG Online, etc).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Please list other campus resources.					
<input type="text"/>					
Other <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often do you use these methods to learn about *new resources and content* for your classes and research:

[illegible]

In terms of virtual UNCG University Libraries services and resources, how frequently have you:

	Never	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Not Familiar with Service/Resource
Used UNCG University Libraries website or catalog to search for materials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Viewed ebooks online	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Viewed streaming films online	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chatted with a librarian through virtual chat (Ask Us)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ask a librarian to create a course guide or libguide for an online course	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Invite a librarian to be embedded or teach in your online class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interlibrary Loaned materials (borrowed from another library)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Book delivery	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What resources would you recommend to your students if they want to

- ☐ Find a topic for a class assignment or research paper
- ☐ Begin a literature search for a class assignment
- ☐ Cite references properly
- ☐ Find primary sources (archival material, data, original research)
- ☐ Learn more about topics covered in class
- ☐ Find material for a multimedia assignment or poster (pictures, video, audio, etc)

What reasons *prevent* you from using UNCG University Libraries' electronic resources more frequently? Select all that apply.

- ☐ My classes or research do not require use of library materials
- ☐ I get all of the information I need on the Internet
- ☐ I use a library outside UNCG (please specify)
- ☐ I get all or most of the information I need from other colleagues
- ☐ The library does not have the information I need
- ☐ The library's electronic search systems are too difficult to use
- ☐ I do not have the proper equipment to access the library's electronic resources
- ☐ I do not get help when I need it from librarians and staff
- ☐ I have problems with electronic access to library resources because of proxy server, firewalls, etc.
- ☐ I prefer print resources over electronic resources
- ☐ Other (please specify)

How important are the following UNCG University Libraries virtual services and resources to your teaching and research:

[illegible]





[illegible]

## Appendix B



All responses are confidential. However, absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing. You may choose not to answer any question which makes you feel uncomfortable or you may stop at any time. There are no risks or benefits for participants. You may print or email this letter for your records. By completing this survey, you consent to be a participant in this research study.

Thank-you so much for your time! If you have any concerns about your rights or how you are being treated you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG at 336-256-1482. Questions about this survey or your benefits or risks may be answered by Samantha Harlow ([slharlow@uncg.edu](mailto:slharlow@uncg.edu)) or Kate Hill ([kmhill6@uncg.edu](mailto:kmhill6@uncg.edu)).

What is your status at UNCG?

- ☐ Freshmen (First Year Student)
- ☐ Sophomore
- ☐ Junior
- ☐ Senior
- ☐ Master's Student
- ☐ PhD Student
- ☐  Other

What is your subject area?

- ☐ Business, Management, Marketing (for example, Economics, Finance, Accounting)
- ☐ Humanities (for example, English, History, Languages, Religious Studies)
- ☐ Social Sciences (for example, Political Science, Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology)
- ☐ Visual or Performing Arts (for example, Art, Music, Drama, Dance)
- ☐ Health Sciences (for example, Nursing, Nutrition, Public Health, Kinesiology)
- ☐ Science and Math (for example, Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Computer Science)
- ☐ Education (for example, Library Science, Teacher Education, Special Education, Counseling)
- ☐  Other (please specify)

Are most of your classes:

- ☐ Online?
- ☐ Face to face?
- ☐ Both online and face to face?

Have you ever used the UNCG University Libraries *virtual* services:

	Yes	No
Jackson Library	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Digital Media Commons (DMC)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Harold Shiffman Music Library	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Special Collections or University Archives (SCUA)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching Resource Center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often do you search for new information to:

	Never	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Not Familiar with Service/Resource
Understand topics covered in class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Start researching an assigned project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gain basic understanding of a subject area to choose a research topic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cite references properly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Consume for fun	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conduct your own independent research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often do you use these resource to find new information for school:

	Never	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly
Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Faculty/Instructor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
UNCG University Libraries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional Organizations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often do you use the following methods to learn about new information for school:

[illegible]

In terms of UNCG's University Libraries virtual services and resources, how frequently have you:

[illegible]



How would you rate your satisfaction with the following UNCG University Libraries services:

[illegible]

What reasons prevent you from using the UNCG University Libraries' electronic resources more frequently? Select all that apply:

- ☐ My coursework does not require the use of library materials
- ☐ I get all of the information I need on the Internet
- ☐  I use a library outside UNCG (please specify)
- ☐ I get all or most of the information I need from other students/colleagues
- ☐ The library does not have the information I need
- ☐ The library's electronic search systems are too difficult to use
- ☐ I do not have the proper equipment to access the library's electronic resources
- ☐ I do not get help when I need it from librarians and staff
- ☐ I have problems with electronic access to library resources because of proxy server, firewalls, etc.
- ☐ I prefer print resources over electronic resources
- ☐  Other (please specify)

What additional services or resources do you wish the library would offer?

Do you have any other comments or concerns about the library and online learning/distance education?

### Block 1

Please enter your email to be entered into a drawing to win 1 of 4 \$25 Barnes & Noble gift cards.

Email:

### Block 2